

US-Citizens Aviation Watch

“Protecting the public’s health, environment, property and promoting safety.”

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Testimony of Jack Saporito to the United States House Sub-Committee on Science on behalf of US-Citizens Aviation Watch Association and the Alliance of Residents Concerning O'Hare.

F. James Sensenbrenner, Jr., Chairman and members of the Subcommittee on
Technology
United States House of Representatives
Committee on Science

re. Hearing to review the federal research and technology development activities to
reduce aviation noise.

Dear Members:

“According to the FAA, about 3.5 million citizens live in areas where aircraft noise exceeds the level at which noise constitutes a sustained interference with routine daily activities. This number is a major reduction from the estimated 7 million citizens similarly impacted in 1974.”

The FAA has grossly underestimated the number of people suffering from aircraft noise pollution. At the very least, the amount of people affected has continued to be the same. “While advances in engine technology have resulted in quieter aircraft (to the ear)...the projected continued growth in air travel threatens to cancel out these gains.”¹ Actually, at O’Hare Airport, and others around the nation, these gains have already been surpassed because of the massive increases in flight operations. And still, flights are expected to double in the next ten years, to two million, with noise contours increasing in size².

Experience has shown us that the methods used by the FAA to count the number of affected people are also suspect: the City of Chicago’s noise figures are much lower than those reflected in preliminary data collected by the Suburban O’Hare Commission’s³ own noise monitoring system. It was projected by Chicago that without noise abatement actions, the number of residents affected by 65 DNL⁴ is 48,460⁴. Yet, the State of

Illinois conservatively predicts that 1.5 million residents were affected (400,000 homeowners)⁵.

Throughout the country there have been tricks employed to give the appearance that the numbers of affected people have been reduced: 1) Narrowing the flight paths, thereby, running the aircraft continuously over the same people; 2) Buying up property; 3) Playing “Beat the box” (maneuvering flight paths to avoid the monitor), turning off the monitor, manipulating the data, running multiple aircraft events over the same monitor simultaneously, burying the monitor in a cluster of trees or another sound absorbing material, etc.

Technology and noise mitigation plans employed to reduce the impacts of aircraft noise, for the most part, have failed: The Expert Noise Panel concluded that the best noise mitigation plan in the country, SEA-TAC, has failed to produce meaningful noise reduction⁶. A five year report on aircraft noise, *Under the Flight Path*⁷, found that virtually all (over 99 percent) of the noise complaints came from homes below the 65 decibel noise threshold set by the FAA.

In fact, and most alarming, the FAA’s use of the 65 DNL metric, as the aviation industry’s baseline, “grossly underestimates the number of people actually affected by aircraft noise, and obscures significant adverse environmental impacts of aircraft noise^{8/9}. US-EPA, OSHA, and most all medical and educational institutions around the world recognize that the average level at which noise damages health is 55DNL.

The FAA and FICAN has steadfastly refused to acknowledge the growing mountains of evidence that noise at levels of 55DNL or greater, and sleep deprivation caused by aircraft noise are major causes of/or contribute to serious diseases, while a major portion of the rest of the industrialized world has taken measures to protect its citizens¹⁰.

Additionally, the FAA has ignored the fact that it is just not the sound that we hear that destroys our health or damages our structures, but sound waves produced by aircraft in frequencies that humans do not hear. Thus, we should be measuring soundwaves from aircraft in other weightings besides “A”.

All this is concerning, especially with the predictions of the future. According to NASA and the FAA, air capacity needs are expected to double within the next 10 years, triple within 20. It is predicted that supersonic planes will increase from approximately 20 to 1500 aircraft in twenty years. Super jumbo air buses are expected to be built, if the airlines buy them. All these innovations will be much louder.

Noise is subjective: People hear differently. For example: Two of my members hear at ranges above normal, one at a <5dB, the other at a <30dB. People do not hear DNL. They hear noise spikes. People do not hear averages. Single event noise disturbs sleep and their health is ruined by it.

Finally, 45dB (single event) is the point at which conversation and learning stops. That is the point where aircraft noise exceeds the level at which noise constitutes a sustained interference with routine daily activities. This is particularly true when your airport has 2700 operations per day.

The FAA is wrong! Aircraft noise now affects tens of millions or more people. A new, fair way to measure aircraft noise is needed to take into account the above mentioned and relief for people is needed now.

Thank you.

Jack Saporito
Director of Alliance of Residents Concerning O'Hare
President of US-Citizens Aviation Watch
(transmitted)

ENDNOTES:

¹ Natural Resources Defense Council. "Flying Off Course: Environmental Impacts of America's Airports." Oct. 1996.

² Source: Bob Hixson -- FAA.

³ Suburban O'Hare Commission consists of nine suburban communities and the county of Du Page.

⁴ Landrum & Brown. "Chicago Noise Compatibility Plan." July, 1994.

⁵ Lee Daniels, Speaker of the Illinois House, to Jack Saporito. May 17, 1995.

⁶ State of Washington, Puget Sound Regional Council. "Expert Arbitration Panel's Review of Noise and Demand/System Management Issues at SEA-TAC International Airport -- Final Decision." Mar. 27, 1996.

⁷ Natural Resources Defense Council. "Under the Flight Path." March, 1997.

⁸ League for the Hard of Hearing. "Airport Noise Fact Sheet for International Noise Awareness Day." April, 1996.

⁹ Natural Resources Defense Council. "Under the Flight Path." March, 1997.

¹⁰ Too numerous sources to cite.